A

MEMOIR

OF

TRANSACTIONS

THAT TOOK PLACE IN

ST. DOMINGO,

IN THE SPRING OF 1799;

AFFORDING AN IDEA OF THE

PRESENT STATE OF THAT COUNTRY

THE REAL CHARACTER OF ITS BLACK GOVERNOR,

Toussaint L'ouverture,

AND THE

SAFETY OF OUR WEST-INDIA ISLANDS FROM ATTACK OR REVOLT;

INCLUDING

THE RESCUE OF A BRITISH OFFICER UNDER SENTENCE OF DEATH.

Inest sua Gratia parvis.

BY

CAPTAIN RAINSFORD,

TWENTY-FOUR YEARS AN OFFICER IN HIS MAJESTY'S ARMY.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY R. B. SCOTT.

At his Office In St. Clement's Lane, Strand.

SOLD BY EDWARD LAWRENCE, IN THE STRAND,

NEARLY OPPOSITE BEAUFORT BUILDINGS.

1802.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

Very little will be expected in the following pages when coming from the pen of a Soldier; but that little will be found to be *his own*; and this on a Subject of much doubt and importance may possibly protract its existence in an age of compilation! He is however, better satisfied to consider it as a small emanation of gratitude to a singular man, who in the possession of extraordinary power, did not use it unworthily.

London, January, 6, 1802.

A

MEMOIR,

ETC.

THE object of public attention is ever the sport of public rumour; and truth is not infrequently affected by the fabrications of the idle and the ignorant, when men and things are misrepresented by popular prejudice.

The present armament of Bonaparte against St. Domingo, and the general alarm for the safety of our colonial possessions from the powerful situation of the Brigands

in that island, have occasioned much conjecture, but produced no authentic information, while on a subject of such importance it becomes a duty in those competent in any degree, to relieve the anxiety of the public mind. Had Bryan Edwards lived, we should not so long have fluctuated in uncertainty.

The present writer has by no means presumed to increase the number of ephemeral details, as contradictory as untrue, which have been offered to the public, of transactions that have now too long deformed this delightful country. In the dangerous duties of his profession, the common accidents of war afforded him a peculiar opportunity of judging (among other affairs) of the present state of St. Domingo, of its defence, and of the character of its extraordinary Governor.

The events themselves, with the opinions resulting from them, form, then, the subject of these pages; and authenticity will supply the place of the decorations of style. To preclude, however, the possibility of doubt, I think it necessary to say thus much of myself:—

Born of a respectable family in the kingdom of Ireland (where my elder brother, Counsellor Rainsford, now enjoys the liberal fortune of our ancestors) * I early embraced the military profession, and joined a regiment under the command of the Earl of Moira, in which I served during the American war. Our corps was considerably employed during two campaigns, and was in the memorable battles of Camden, &c. I afterwards unfortunately left that regiment to enter into a provincial

* My eldest sister, now Princess of Monaca, was married to the late Lieutenant General Doyle.

one, commanded by the late Lord Charles Montague, and served in Jamaica four years. On the commencement of the present war, I went to the continent in the corps of Royal Fusileers commanded by Colonel Hardy, and shared its complicated hardships during the retreat.*

* In this arduous situation I had the happiness to effect two orders, which, as they exhibit the hardships of that period, I subjoin :—Being commanded by my ever-regretted Colonel to bring up the cloathing of the troops, I found it only to be effected by cutting my way with three boats through the ice for twenty miles. We, however, succeeded, happily, and saved to Government at least ten thousand pounds.

Another night, during the retreat, twenty-one of our waggons, with sick and wounded men, arrived very late at a town called Zwoll, where my corps was quartered, but were refused admittance by the Dutch guard, who kept the gate. It was a dreadful night, and many absolutely died from the cold of the men under the command of Colonel Drummond of the Guards. I was ordered to compel their ad-

I was removed in May, 1795, through the interest of my inestimable brother-in-law, General Doyle, to a black corps, to be raised in the West Indies, under the command of General Keppel. I went to Barbadoes, and from thence to Jamaica, where the corps was to be raised. I arrived on the 17th of August, and continued on duty till a severe attack of the yellow fever compelled my return in his Majesty's ship, Sampson. After recovering in England, at the instance of his Royal Highness the Duke of York I went to Martinique in 1798, but it not being understood by General Keppel that his corps was to be levied there, he ordered me back to Jamaica, from whence, I found on my arrival, the officers had sailed for England.

mission, and effected it; but not till after many threats, and I had left them three minutes only to consider, before I should attack them, which in such a cause, and at such a time, must have been done with energy.

Desirous, as I always am, of being with my regiment, to facilitate that object I undertook the mode of returning to Martinique by beating up to the island of St. Thomas, an exertion of considerable difficulty and danger. This, however, I but little regarded; and Admiral Smith, with whom I had been long acquainted, kindly accommodated me in his cabin on board the Hannibal to the Mole St. Nicholas. Losing no opportunity of proceeding on my voyage, I went on board a little Danish schooner, commanded by Mr. Frazer.

We had not been many days at sea, when a violent hurricane having dismasted the vessel, drove us under the walls of Cape François. Thus unfortunately commenced the opportunities of obtaining that information and forming that judgment of the Present State of St Domingo, which I am about to submit to the public. Had I

conceived it possible, at that time, that a relation of facts respecting that unhappy country would have become so interesting to my friends, I might from these opportunities, have collected much respecting it, and been enabled to communicate what I collected in a better form.

Thus situated, the Brigand boats soon came out to meet us; and it was recommended to me, as the only means to prevent the confiscation of the vessel, and avoid becoming myself a prisoner of war, to pass for an American.

We were permitted to land at the once famous city of the Cape; and the first object that excited our attention amidst thousands of People of Colour of every description, was the respectable TOUSSAINT in familiar conversation with two private Brigands. He very civilly came up to us—enquired the news—from whence we

came? and our destination. I accommodated my answers to the occasion, and to the character I was to support, and complained of severe treatment from the English! to which he replied, "*Je pense que les Anglois y sont bien malade à la Mole*"—he believed the English were very sick at the Mole—and we took our leave.

I then retired to the American hotel, and was introduced to the table d' hote—to behold for the first time a *perfect system of equality!*

Here were officers and privates, the general and the fifer, at the same table indiscriminately. I had the honour of sitting near a fat drummer, who very freely helped himself from my dish, and addressed me with frequent repetitions of "*A votre Santé bon Americain.*" Here also TOUSSAINT dined, but did not take the head of the table, from the idea (I was informed) that

no man should be invested with superiority but in the field. In the evening I went to the billiard table, where TOUISSANT also came. Much hilarity prevailed, and his affability highly increased the satisfaction of the company. I played with him, and found nothing to dissipate the pleasure which the novelty of the scene inspired. There were several tables in the same room, at which all played with the same familiary with which they dined.

I was here informed that a review was to take place on the following day, in the plain of the Cape; and desirous of being present at such a spectacle, I was accompanied by some Americans, and others of my own country who resided in the island under that appellation.

In traversing this once superb town, what a scene of desolation every where presented itself to my contemplation! On

the site where elegance and luxury had united all their powers to delight the voluptuary, remained nothing but ruins. On these were erected temporary houses for the American merchants and little shops of the natives, which but exhibited the devastation with additional horror. The great street still contained the walls of many superb edifices of five and six stories high, and most beautiful structure; highly-finished gilt balustrades, in some instances, yet remained. Nor was this all—in different parts of the general ruin the skeletons of their possessors were mingled with the broken walls—

"There in the ruin, heedless of the dead,
"The shelter-seeking peasant rears his shed;
"And, wondering man could want the larger pile,
"Exults, and owns his cottage with a smile."

Through this dreadful scene I passed to behold a review, of the real grandeur of

which I had not the least conception. There were two thousand officers out, Generals and Ensigns, all carryingarms—yet with the utmost regularity and attention to rank—none of that disregard which had marked the leisure of the preceding day being the least evident. Each general officer had a demi-brigade, which went through the manual exercise with a degree of expertness I had seldom before witnessed, and they performed excellently well several manœuvres applicable to their method of fighting. At *a whistle* a whole brigade ran three or four hundred yards, and then, separating, threw themselves flat on the ground, changing to their backs and sides, and all the time keeping up a strong fire till recalled—after this they formed again into their wonted regularity; and this manœuvre is executed with such facility and precision, as totally to prevent cavalry from charging them in bushy and hilly countries. Indeed, such complete

subordination prevailed, so much promptness and dexterity, as must astonish an European who had known any thing of their previous situation.

After the review I returned to the city, to continue my solitary walk through the remaining monuments of human ferocity, and indulge in contemplating the vanity of all sublunary establishments.

I was brooding over scenes where Fancy herself had once been satiated, when I arrived at a large square, in the centre of which was a considerable eminence, and a seat on the top;—there were two centinels to guard it—of whom I enquired if I might ascend the steps? They answered in the affirmative, but cautioned me not to touch the *Cap of Liberty* which crowned it, for it was SACRED TO SANTHONAX AND POLVEREL! My curiosity induced me to ascend; when I perused, immediately under the cap, a showy in-

scription in French, of which I do not exactly recollect the idiom, not daring to take a copy, but it was to the following purport—

My Friends,

We came to make you free.

The French Nation gives liberty to the World.

YOU ARE FREE.

Guard your Freedom.

Vive la Liberte—Vive la Republique.

Vive Robespierre!

This inscription, I understand, formed a part of their speech in 1793, when the Blacks and the Mulattos carried them in triumph to the Government-House, and afterwards set fire to the city in eight different places. They used every woman with savage barbarity, and then murdered with the bayonet, man, woman, and child. Sixty-two thousand inhabitants left the city. They exterminated the Whites,

and revelled in their cruelty eighteen days! Such is man when in the possession of power! and happy would it be for the human race if the Insurgents of St. Domingo, so little removed from savage life, were not countenanced by those who have partaken of the felicities of civilized society. Of the carnage that flew through this island enough has already been said; but it is yet in the recollection of many Americans, that the view of the city in flames, the adjacent sugar works, &c. was the most dreadful ever beheld.

After a long perambulation over these scenes of former horrors, I returned to the hotel, but with a mind so much impressed with what I had seen, that for a considerable time I could not divest myself of the most terrible ideas:—my imagination was haunted with the shades of those who had fallen, and murdered worth and innocence were ever before my eyes.——I was also dis-

suaded from walking too much, lest by some observation I might be suspected not to be an American.

For three weeks I continued among these people; and, except the recollection of what *had* been, without any other sacrifice than my wish to be on duty, and the necessity of subscribing to every sentiment hostile to my country, I enjoyed the amusements and the habits of a capital. I remained unmolested and comfortable.

On the topography of the island, I shall not retail what is told by those who recite its history, nor have I ever had leisure to inspect it. It is, I believe, considered the richest, as well as the largest of all the islands, except Cuba; and nature seems to have lavished on it the advantages which are but partial in the others. It extends about 400 miles in length, and is more than 70 in breadth, yet completely peopled. Its na-

tural defence is unequalled, being entirely fortified by vast rocks and extensive shoals. It contains gold (perhaps *really the least* valuable of its productions) and the most charming rivers meander through its variegated soil.

From these reasons, labour is so much abridged, that no want of leisure is felt through the pursuits of business, of pleasure, or of arms. It would be no small gratification to the feeling heart, to perceive the peasant in other countries, enjoy a portion of the ease of the labourer of St. Domingo.

The present productive system seems to be founded in a reference to first principles. Every soul employs a certain portion of their time to labour, which is chiefly agricultural; and all take the field from a sense of duty to *themselves*. A perfect consolidation appears in all their conduct, and I

never saw a concession in them which did not come from the heart. I have more than once seen sixty thousand of them reviewed, at one time, on the plains of the Cape, in complete subordination *in the field*, and whose united determination against an invading enemy, would be victory or death! No coersion is necessary among them, and it is of course unattempted; the only punishment inflicted, is a sense of shame produced by slight confinement.

Amongst a people thus hardened into an *orderly* ferocity—trained from inclination—impenetrably fortified on the finest territory on earth, and next to inaccessible to external attack, what hopes are entertained of the success of the present armament I know not; but, whatever might be expected from a *compromise* with TOUSSAINT, I feel perfectly convinced no other means will succeed in the subjugation of St.

Domingo. United as are the blacks and mulattœs, *fifty thousand* men would ere long be dissipated in such an attempt; and if the number now sent against them *could* be found sufficient to effect a temporary conquest, what number of men would continue to keep them in subjection?

And with respect to any views they may be imagined to contemplate of extending their possessions, none who know the respectable state of defence in which our Islands are kept, will ever entertain the smallest fear respecting them. Of a territory the extent of Cuba, I would not hazard so much, but in the present situation of our islands, so comparatively small, possessed by Planters of distinguished humanity and talent,* defended by a

* Notwithstanding it has been of late years the fashion to consider the character of a planters as derogatory to humanity, and incapable of being blended

militia, prompt on all occasions; with an army well appointed on their shores, under

with any of those qualities that ameliorate the condition of the species, every opportunity which I have been afforded of judging has tended to convince me of the contrary. Nothing indeed can be more cruel than to single out any description of persons for public reprobation, as best suits the purpose of the fanatic or the partizan; and nothing is more fatal to the cause of truth than an implicit reliance on the vague reports of their enthusiasm, which must inevitably preclude the possibility of acquiring correct information, or adhering to facts if produced to their notice.---If the young and the thoughtless squander the accumulations of their ancestors, it is certainly no evidence of general voluptiousness.---If there be circumstances exceptionable in the conduct of the Slave Trade, does it follow that the planter is a merciless executioner? certainly not---it would be hostile to his interest, and inexpedient in his situation.---As merchants and as men, many are highly and extensively esteemed and regarded; and instances of affection and regret in the slaves they have been described to torture, are neither infrequent nor unrecorded.

the superintendance of ability, experience, and power at home; and a vigilant navy round their coasts, the wonder of the world—few will have sufficient temerity to suggest that the people I have been describing, will leave their favourite and favoured island for the mere purpose of a vain gasconade—and against those whom I am persuaded they would rather conciliate as their friends.

Before I proceed to state the dreadful occurrence which nearly terminated my existence, on the island whose unfortunate situation I have been so candidly describing, I shall give a sketch of the man who holds so conspicuous a situation, and of whom so little is really known.

Toussaint L'ouverture, the present Commandant of St. Domingo, is one of those characters, which contentions for

power and the extention of territory, as well as the jars of individual interest have not infrequently introduced to astonish the World.

Born a Slave, in which capacity he continued till the revolution, it is hostile to *received opinions* to consider him in any other light than as a fortunate Brigand; but chance has directed that the present writer should be constrained to acknowlege—he is worthy of imitation sa a man—he excites admiration as a governor—and as a general, he is yet unsubdued without the probability of subjection! His regard for the unfortunate appears the love of human kind; and, dreaded by different nations, he is the foe of none.—To the English he is by no means inimical, and, in possession of many of the blessings of humanity, he courts the acceptance of the world.

He is a perfect black, at present about fifty-five years of age—of a venerable appearance, but possessed of uncommon discernment. Of great suavity of manners, he was not at all concerned in the perpetration of the massacres, or in the conflagration.

He is stiled the *General en Chef*, and is always attended by four Aids-de-Camp. He wears as a uniform, a kind of blue spencer, with a large red cape falling over his shoulders, and red cuffs,with eight rows of lace on his arms, and a pair of large gold epaulettes thrown back on his shoulders ; a scarlet waistcoat, pantaloons and half-boots ; a round hat with a red feather and national cockade ; and an extreme large sword is suspended from from his side. He receives a voluntary respect from every description of his countrymen, which is more than returned by the

affability of his behaviour, andthe goodness of his heart. Of his civilities to myself, I have sufficient reason to be proud.

I met him frequently, during my stay in his *dominions*, and had no occasion of complaint, even from human errors.

After the vessel in which I arrived had undergone a thorough repair, at the Cape, we cleared out of the harbour, and I once more set sail, flushed with hopes of a speedy arrival at St. Thomas's; but—

—"Heav'n from all creatures hides the book of fate."

On the third day after we left the Cape, our unfortunate vessel sprung a leak, and we were obliged to put into Fort Dauphine, now called Fort Egalite, about forty miles from the Cape.

In this situation, the master of the ves-

sel, as well as myself, apprehended no danger or impropriety in in our going on shore; and, hoisting Danish colours, we came to anchor under a small fort. I unthinkingly landed with the master, and in less than half an hour was arrested by four Blacks, and a Mulatto Officer of great ferocity. They returned with me instantly on board, and placed two centinels over me. I was informed that suspicions had arisen of my being a spy, and that my trial would be prompt and decisive. On the morrow I was to be tried *and condemned*.

Under these apprehensions I was to pass the night, and to prepare for my appearance before certainly the *blackest!* tribunal that ever sat in judgment. I, however, confined my reflections to the best means of destroying my baggage, including my military appointments; which I happily effected by putting trunks and all out of the cabin window in the dead of the night,

with a weight attached sufficient to sink them.

The silence of the night, interrupted only by the murmurs of the ocean—the clamours of the guard, and the distant sounds from the shore, induced a stronger degree of melancholy than I, perhaps, ever experienced.——A confused idea of my fate, with the *shame* rather than the terrors of an ignominious death, revolving in my mind, deprived me of the possibility of rest, or the smallest preparation for the event so soon and so harshly announced.

In the morning I was taken before a black general, named Muro, whose appearance augured well, for he bore the principal mythological characteristics of justice—he was *blind of an eye*. He interrogated me, and insisted I was not an American, but an English spy reconnoitering the coast. He informed me, that on

the morrow I should be tried by a General Court Martial—and dismissed me.

I was then conducted to a dark prison, with the usual concomitants of wretchedness, and treated as one who meditated some dire plot against the happiness of their country. I had no bed, nor other provision but some coarse dry fish which I could not eat. Next morning, at ten o'clock, I was regularly brought before a military court, composed of twelve general officers.—All I could plead in my behalf would not avail me, not having the proper passports, or American certificates; in fact, my trial *was prompt and decisive*—I was condemned to suffer DEATH on the next day!

The master of the vessel, poor Frazer, with great dignity of character and the most affectionate solicitude, exerted the utmost of his little power by protesting

against the judgment, and insisting I was an American—but it was without effect, and I was remanded to my cell, loaded with chains, and consigned to misery, till the sentence of the Court should be transmitted to TOUSSAINT, without whose sanction it could not be executed.

For fourteen days I lay suspended between life and death, without any other consolation than the kindness of my gaoler, whose taciturnity extended to inform me, every night, I should be *hanged* on the next day. To afford me repose, I was furnished with dried sugar-canes, and was ill supplied nightly with coarse flesh and water—the cheering delusions of hope no longer lightened my imagination, and I abandoned all human projects for ever.*

* I cannot omit here to pay the tribute of gratitude to a poor unknown Female of Colour, whose pity, more extensive than her power, would have al-

At the expiration of that period, the answer of TOUSSAINT arrived; but, instead of confirming my sentence, that truly great man, although I have since been convinced *he had ascertained the fact* of my

leviated the horrors of my situation. She came occasionally in the night to the window of my cell, which looked into a court to which she found access by an avenue that was unguarded. She brought me food, and wine or spirits, the remains of which, to prevent enquiry, she was anxious should be destroyed. The humane sympathy expressed by her in these nocturnal offerings to misery, have repeatedly brought to my remembrance the eulogium of Lediard on a sex ever prone to tender offices. In compliment to my humble benefactor I quote the passage, and heartily subscribe to the sentiments:---

"I have," says he, "always remarked that women, in all countries, are civil, obliging, tender, and humane: that they are ever inclined to be gay and cheerful, timorous and modest; and that they do not hesitate, like men, to perform a kind or generous action.---Not haughty, nor arrogant, not supercilious, they are full of courtesy, and fond of society---more

being a British Officer, disdained to triumph over an individual whom misfortune had thrown in his way. He ordered me to be released and suffered to proceed on my voyage, with the greatest magnanimity adding, " You must never return to this island, *without the proper passports !*"

liable in general to err than man, but in general, also, more virtuous, and performing more good actions than he. To a woman, whether civilized or savage, I never addressed myself in the language of decency and friendship---without receiving a decent and friendly answer---with man it has often been otherwise.

" In wandering over the barren plains of inhospitable Denmark, through honest Sweden, and frozen Lapland, rude and churlish Finland, unprincipled Russia, and the wide-spread regions of the wandering Tartar,---if hungry, dry, cold, wet, or sick, the women have ever been friendly to me, and uniformly so ; and to add to this virtue, (so worthy of the appellation of benevolence,) these actions have been performed in so free and so kind a manner, that if I was thirsty, I drank the sweetest draught, and if hungry, I ate the coarse meal with a double relish."

To describe my feelings on such an unexpected reverse, would be difficult and useless. Restored to myself once more, I did not long remain on a part of the island where my sufferings would have tended to efface the agreeable impression I had received at Cape François; but chearfully bidding adieu to this interesting soil, sailed for St. Thomas's on the next day, and very soon reached my long desired destination, the island of Martinique.

On my arrival, I met with a reception marked with the usual kindness and urbanity of the commander in chief, General Cuyler, who ordered me the usual remuneration for the loss of my baggage. I am also informed that I was honored with a congratulatory letter from his Royal Highness the Duke of York, which from some unaccountable accident I did not receive.

Much would remain to be said, were I to obey a natural impulse; but the pen, though often a deadly weapon, is one I am but little accustomed to, I shall therefore lay it down, at least for the present, with the confidence that if I have contributed but little advantage, I have effected as little injury.

Printed at the office of R. B. Scott, 27, Clements lane.

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March '76